

Success

Apprentice Outreach Pipeline Training Women in the Trades

Kelly Ann Monroe: Hands-On Career

Kelly Ann Monroe likes to operate heavy equipment and she likes doing Native beadwork. While those activities might seem like an unusual pairing, Monroe says they are more similar than one might expect. “They both involve intricate hand work,” she said. One requires finesse at the controls to move earth and materials; the other creates ornate handiwork that reflects Monroe’s Athabaskan and Eskimo heritage.

Monroe started a career path in social work, graduating from Stanford University in 1999. She went to work for AmeriCorp, but didn’t like sitting in an office. She longed to be outdoors. And she enjoyed working with her hands more than she liked working at a computer. She grew up around heavy equipment – her father owned a heavy equipment business in Nenana. So when she considered changing careers, she was drawn to become an operator.

Monroe applied for an apprenticeship with Alaska Operating Engineers Local 302 but didn’t get in on the first round. She took an interview skills class through Alaska Works Partnership and was accepted on her second try. Today, Monroe is two years into her apprenticeship. As part of her training, she has participated in the past two annual pipeline training events in Fairbanks. The first year she learned how to dig trenches to lay pipe. This year she learned to operate a crane. Next year she would like to learn how to operate a side boom. Her apprenticeship and the pipeline training events demonstrated to Monroe the need for keeping a workforce ready for Alaska’s next big pipeline project.

“You can see the importance of training and making sure we have local people trained at home to do the job,” Monroe said. “All of our instructors are the best in the business. Some have thirty to forty years of pipeline experience.”

As part of her on-the-job training, Monroe has operated a loader on a crusher crew for Pruhs Construction in Palmer. She also worked at Point Thompson for Nanuq Inc. operating a dozer to build an ice road. She has worked on the North Slope for Doyon Limited, operating a zoomboom and loader. She also operated a dozer for a demolition project on Ft. Wainwright.

“I’m much happier now, working as an operator, than I was working in an office,” Monroe said. “I expect to be with the operators for the rest of my working life.”

In her off time, she enjoys snowmachining, cutting firewood and beadwork. Her beadwork can be found in the fine art galleries of the Alaska Native Arts Foundation in Anchorage.



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